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ABSTRACT

Although socio-cultural awareness is an important element of discourse, freshman composition's primary obligation is to provide students with instruction in and practice "owning" a process of writing that foregrounds writing as a rhetorical art. Students should leave the course more aware of and better able to employ powerful, flexible strategies for owning the art of writing. This is what course descriptions promise, what students anticipate or expect--and what they need. It is imperative that pedagogy keep foregrounded the art of writing's recursive interrelatedness and its dynamic ties to rhetoric and context. Without an integrating pedagogy, cultural studies can be a back door to a literary focus, especially for inexperienced teachers or for those who understand cultural studies in terms of theory but not of composition theory or pedagogy. Foregrounding a certain kind of reading practice, the analysis of cultural artifacts encoded in discourse, critical composition preempts developing an art of writing, apparently assuming that students know how to write. Lauer's "Pedagogy for Writing as Art" provides inventional, exploratory, and rhetorical strategies. From a general writing context, students select subjects with which they have personal exigencies: writing has the potential to be meaningful inquiry. The "starting guide" helps students to discover a potential writing subject; the "exploratory guide" has students examine subjects and dissonances from static, dynamic, and relative perspectives. This nonthreatening approach helps students enter a discussion of the socio-cultural from "where they are" compositionally ad socio-culturally. (Writing strategies from Lauer's "Pedagogy" is attached.) (NKA)

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PUTTING MY MOUTH WHERE YOUR MONEY IS:

COMPOSITION, CRITIQUE, AND COMMERCE

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Putting My Mouth Where Your Money Is:
Composition, Critique, and Commerce

In her recent CCCC paper, Patricia Harkin suggested that students' perceiving themselves as educational consumers should remind us of the value of beginning "where students are," of "selling" what we are about--be it art-making or consciousness-raising. Cultural studies argues for the power of discourse and responsibility for what we are as teachers. Yet, as teachers, we notice that this major strand of composition theory is often pedagogically weak and ignores this adage. While I do not deny the value of cultural critique nor claim it incompatible with teaching composition, I do have concerns regarding culturally-focused composition instruction at the freshman level. I fear that such efforts often do not take students where they are compositionally or socio-culturally.

Compositionally: When/how is writing taught?
What happens to writing as art?

While socio-cultural awareness is an important element of discourse, freshman composition's primary obligation is to provide students with instruction in and practice "owning" a process of writing that foregrounds writing as a rhetorical art. Students should leave this level more aware of and better able to employ powerful, flexible strategies for "owning" the art of writing. This is what course descriptions "promise," what students anticipate or expect--and what they need. For most, in fact, no other course will focus on students' making this art their own.

Freshman composition, then, HAS content, the art of writing. Moreover, it is imperative that pedagogy keep foregrounded this art's recursive interrelatedness and its dynamic ties to rhetoric and context. If the focus shifts from this "holistic" approach, process becomes reified, fragmented, decontextualized, or detached from rhetoric. This happens, for example, when modeling or reading gains priority. Nonetheless, those who assume that reading strategies writing strategies make still comment, "They have to write about something, so it might as well be literature" (or the cultural?). Having taught every level of English studies, including reading and integrated language arts, I am compelled to remind that, despite the intimate connection of reading and writing, novices cannot easily operationalize the one in service of the other.

I mention this subtle but significant shift in focus because, without an integrating pedagogy, cultural studies can be a back door to a literary focus, especially for inexperienced teachers or for those who understand cultural studies in terms of theory but not of composition theory or pedagogy. Foregrounding a certain kind of reading practice, the analysis of cultural

artifacts encoded in discourse, critical composition preempts developing an art of writing, apparently assuming that students know how to write.

This is especially the case given the time and curricular constraints of freshman composition. However advantageous, integrated approaches are more feasible for self-contained classrooms, interdisciplinary courses, or block scheduling than they are for entry-level college composition. We must seriously consider how much can be done in twelve or fifteen weeks, particularly in light of the complexity of composing, the degree of preparedness of many of our students, and the near guarantee that, for the foreseeable future, most instructors of freshman composition will be adjunct faculty or graduate instructors with little training in composition theory or pedagogy.

Culturally: From whose perspective is critique approached?

I am also concerned whether cultural composition meets students "where they are" socio-culturally. We are cognizant of Burke's reminder that we use language and it uses us, especially those naive as to the power of disourse. This awareness that discourse shapes and constrains lives and groups increases the import of Foucault's call to scholars. We are enthusiastic, and, to some extent, I think, burdened with responsibility to reaccentuate, empower, and resist. In our own theoretical sophistication and fervor, do we impose a level and type of "enlightenment" meaningful to us but not necessarily to our students? In doing so, do we not inscribe students in yet another subject position?

Perhaps more important, since inscription is unavoidable, are such efforts occurring at students' or instructor's levels of awareness? Are we meeting students "where they are," building upon their dissonances and inquiry--or our own? Are students better off as a result of our efforts--or are we? Will students say they got their money's worth? Did they learn about writing and can they employ that learning in other writing events? Was cultural awareness made relevant to what they were buying?

To raise students' awareness, we need to approach the socio-cultural in ways that are meaningful to them, each of them, a tall order since a class may be differ more culturally that educationally. Otherwise, we loose, bore, threaten, or antagonize students. Our efforts risk begetting cynics, uninformed resisters, or captive audiences inscribed in yet another unsolicited subject position.

Interrelating cultural demystification and writing instruction, then, requires a sophisticated, powerful pedagogy which foregrounds the art of writing while meeting students "where they are" in terms of both writing and the socio-cultural. This is particularly true for freshman composition. Janice

Lauer's composition pedagogy provides one such corrective. To some extent, it is unfortunate that Lauer's pedagogy is identified with a textbook since this limits its influence primarily to users of that text. Being theoretically grounded and pedagogically sophisticated, this pedagogy has much to offer our field.

An Integrating Pedagogy:

Grounded in notions of writing as rhetorical art, as collaborative, and as inquiry, Lauer's pedagogy provides inventional, exploratory, and rhetorical strategies. From a general writing context, students select subjects with which they have personal exigencies: writing has the potential to be meaningful inquiry. As students adjust strategies to different writing contexts, they see themselves developing an art of writing. Its inquiry approach empowers writers to initiate discourse within the realm of personal dissonance and to begin exploration within the space of their experiences. The inventional and exploratory strategies, in particular, enable students to question the socio-cultural and to move from "personal" dissonance to larger issues of the cultural.

Starting Guide: Assigned a general context, of place or issue, for example, the Starting Guide which foregrounds dissonance helps students discover potential writing subject. The inventional strategies of the Guide help students to verbalize "felt" dissonance, contrast expectations and values about a subject with the reality of the situation or experience, and formulate questions which capture the dissonance and direct inquiry/writing. In completing these strategies, students can be encouraged to consider the cultural bases that underlie their attitudes and the perceptions with which they identify. Instructors, for example, might help students foreground the socio-cultural sources of those dissonances which students thought they "owned." Teachers might have students articulate ways in which their perceptions and attitudes toward the subject would be different if they lived elsewhere or belonged to a different social class, gender, or ethnic group.

Exploratory Guide: The Exploratory Guide of Lauer's pedagogy, a modified tagmemic approach, has students examine subjects and dissonances from static, dynamic, and relative perspectives. Identifying distinctive features of subject and dissonance as the static perspective directs, students can be asked to consider the seemingly static cultural aspects, perhaps those beliefs, values, practices that relate to the subject or that support dissonances they considered as "real" or reasonable. The dynamic perspective includes , subject, dissonance, and audience can In exploring subjects and dissonances categorically, contrastively, and analogically, students can be helped to see that the dynamics of their subject and their own attitudes are influenced by dynamics of relevant areas in the larger socio-~~cultural sphe~~re.

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Lauer's pedagogy provides a powerful, nonthreatening vehicle for examining such socio-cultural influences as the power of community to shape and define relationships, groups, events and how codes of behavior govern interactions. While foregrounding writing, this nonthreatening approach helps students enter a discussion of the socio-cultural from "where they are" compositionally and socio-culturally. Writing to resolve dissonance. after all, provides space to explore culture because dissonance is a effect of one's socio-cultural location and an indication of one's level of cultural awareness. Thus, students can be led to recognize, probe, and articulate the influence of societal, family, community, peer values and beliefs upon their own thinking, valuing, and perceiving of reality. Considering socio-cultural influences that shape their ways of thinking, students experience the public nature of inquiry and the social, rhetorical, artistic nature of writing.

Lauer's Pedgagogy for Writing as Art

Inventional and Exploratory Strategies

Starting Guide involves:

1. Listing subject within writing context about which one has strong feelings, positive or negative;
2. a. Writing down one's expectations/values for the general subject area in which subject fits, and
   b. Matching these expectations/values with aspects of the subject that either fall short of or exceed them;
3. Formulating questions based on dissonance(s) and expressing what one want to investigate; and
4. Selecting a question to guide writing.

Exploratory Guide (Three Perspectives):

Static: Unchanging, distinctive features
- Distinctive to writer, to others concerning subject.
- Characterizing features/details. Relate to question?
- Elements, parts of subject relate to dissonance?
- Characterize your attitude toward subject?
  - Cultural views underlying your attitude?
- In a caricature, what would you exaggerate?
- What recurring images come to mind about subject?
- What contributes to you dissonance?

Dynamic: In processes, changing (subj/dissonance, experience)
- How has the subject, your attitude toward changed over time?
- Have you always had dissonance toward it? why/not?
- How has subject changed, developed over time?
- What are influences, causes, effects of changes?
- Larger cultural history (political, economic, social, artistic, ethnic) surround your subject, influence your attitude toward subject?

Relative: Consider subject/dissonance relationally
- Classify, locate subject in various categories.
- Relate subject contrastively and/or comparatively to representatives from one or more categories.
- Develop an analogic relationship.

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